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A PARAPHRASE OF THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.[1]

Concluded.

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CHAPTER IX.

(1–3) How deep is my interest in my countrymen and how deeply I lament their rejection of the Messiah is evidenced by my willingness to perish if thereby I might save them. (4, 5) Their lapse seems the more sad in view of their great privileges and advantages as the theocratic people, chief of which is the descent of Christ from Jewish ancestry on his human side, while, in the depths of his being, he partakes in the nature of the blessed Deity. (6–9) But the unbelief of my people will not involve the failure of God's promise. If we look back at our history we perceive that there has been a selective process going on; not all members of the nation proved themselves true children of God. We see this in the case of the two sons of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, and their descendants. Only one of these lines proved faithful to God; yet God's promise to his people was not thereby annulled. (10–13) Another example is found in the two lines which are descended from Isaac, that of Esau and that of Jacob. The fact that God made choice of the latter rather than of the former shows that Jacob was not chosen for any merit of his own.

(14–16) Because God chooses one and rejects another shall we conclude that he is unjust? No; for in the law he claims that prerogative. His choice of any is based, not upon their merits or strivings, but upon his own sovereign mercy. (17, 18) An example of this absoluteness of God's action is seen in his dealing with the Pharaoh. The Old Testament says that God brought him upon the field of history in order to exhibit his power upon him. This example also shows that God extends his mercy to men or hardens them in sin according to his good pleasure.

(19–21) But this view will provoke the objection: If a man, in pursuing a sinful course, is but fulfilling the divine will, how can God attach guilt to his action? The question is presumptuous. Man is quite incompetent thus to judge the procedure of God. Men are like clay in the hands of the potter. Can the clay complain, if the potter makes from the same lump vessels for

[1] I have prefixed in parentheses the number of the verses to the paraphrase, instead of affixing it, for greater convenience of reference.

noble and vessels for ignoble use? (22–24) So, if God, while wishing, on the one hand, to exhibit his justice in the punishment of some men for whom this penalty had been determined, yet withheld its execution for a time out of compassion, who has a right to complain (either of the long suffering or of the determination to destroy)? and if, further, it was his purpose to exhibit, during this period of forbearance, his saving mercy on some whom he had chosen for this end, — whether Jews or Gentiles, — who has the right to complain? (25–29) The Old Testament speaks of such acts of God as being wholly independent of all claims or merits on man's part, as, for example, in the call of the Gentiles, and in the preservation of a remnant in Israel.

(30–33) Since God's action is never based upon human merit, and since he always acts justly, what must we conclude is the reason, on the Jews' side, of their rejection and of the Gentiles' acceptance? It is that while the Jews were striving to establish their own righteousness by works, the Gentiles have accepted the righteousness which is offered through the gospel on condition of faith. As of old Israel found the divine word the occasion of their overthrow and calamity, because of their disobedience to God, so do they now again stumble over the truth that faith is that which God requires.

CHAPTER X.

(1–3) How earnestly do I yearn for the salvation of my people, and well I may, for they still have much interest in their ancestral religion, but how mixed with misconception of its real principles and demands. From this misconception flows this futile effort to win salvation by merit instead of accepting that which God graciously offers. (4, 5) There can be no thought of the law as the means of salvation now that Christ has come; and, indeed, it was never actually a means of salvation, because its requirement was perfect obedience; it could not save without that and that was always wanting. (6–11) The faith principle is quite different. It sets before us no impracticable task. It only asks us to accept the divine promise and truth which is close at hand; it demands only that we lean in faith upon Christ; resting in him and confessing him as Saviour we shall have security and peace. (12–15) This is a truth of universal application. Its promise of salvation is as wide as the race. All may accept it. Nor can the Jews justly say that this way of grace was not known to them, and so excuse themselves.

(16–21) Let us examine this justification of disobedience. Have they not had abundant opportunity to learn these truths of grace and faith? Yes; they pervaded their own Scriptures as the light of the sun pervades the world. Already, in Moses and the prophets, we find allusions both to the extension of the true religion to the heathen and to the hardness of the chosen people. [Thus the truths which I now teach and the reasons for them are not new, but old, and should have been understood and appreciated by the Jewish people.]

CHAPTER XI.

(1–4) That God has not utterly cast off the Jewish people from his favor I am myself a living evidence. Remember that, as in former times when the nation seemed lost in idolatry and sin a remnant was still left who remained true to God, (5–10) just so now there is, in accordance with the provisions of God's grace, a faithful few. The majority, seeking to uphold their own self-righteousness, have fallen a prey to moral hardening, but some have accepted the terms of God's purpose of grace. To the others we might apply the Old Testament language in which the prophets describe the obduracy of the faithless. (11, 12) But even the lapse of the nation as a whole will not be permanent. By rejecting the Messiah they have occasioned his earlier and fuller proclamation to the heathen who, by accepting him, will prove to the Jews what they have lost by not doing so. The Jews will thus be stimulated, by the example of the Gentiles and by the blessings which the heathen will be seen to enjoy, to accept Christ also. If a benefit resulted to the Gentiles from the Jews' lapse, how much greater a blessing will flow from the recovery of the Jews to the Messianic kingdom which the conversion of the heathen will facilitate!

(13–16) I am writing to a Gentile church. As the messenger of the gospel to Gentiles it will be seen that I am acting within the true scope of my office in pointing out the bearing of the Jews' fall upon the heathen world. Certainly if God could thus overrule their fall for good, he surely could make their conversion a yet greater good, and this is that for which I hope, for the nation is still holy unto God—his peculiar possession. (17, 18) But you Gentiles, whose entrance into the Messianic kingdom the fall of the Jews has facilitated, should not conclude that this was due to some merit of yours and so fall into pride and boasting over the Jews. Remember that the ancient theocracy is still the basis of the Messianic kingdom. (19–21) Do not therefore imagine that it was favoritism on God's part for you which led him to reject the Jews in order to receive you. He will reject you as surely if you, like the Jews, become unfaithful to him. Be humble, then, and beware lest you repeat their sad history.

(22–24) In these dispensations we behold at once God's leniency and his severity; to those who have been true to him he has been very gracious; to the disobedient he has been severe. If now he would graciously receive you Gentiles upon faith, how much more will he take back into his favor his peculiar people when they shall forsake their disobedience.

(25–27) Consider well these providential dispensations, nor presume to criticise or explain them. In God's wisdom, a partial and temporary fall of Israel has been permitted, but, at last, the nation as a whole shall be saved and the hopes of future good which her prophets express be realized. (28–32) The displeasure of God at the Jews inured to your benefit, but for the sake of the founders of the nation his ancient people shall still be the object of

God's favor. God's purpose in the choice of the nation shall not finally miscarry, for as the Jews' lapse occasioned your speedier reception, so shall the divine favor bestowed upon you be the means, in turn, of hastening their recovery. God's purpose in the hardening and rejection of both classes (Jews and Gentiles) is subordinate to his purpose to make both the object of his mercy.

(33–36) How profound are these mysteries of God's providence and government. We cannot explain them. No man can penetrate his secrets, as the Scriptures say, for he is himself at once the source, the means, and the end of all things; as such let us render him all praise!

CHAPTER XII.

(1, 2) By appeal to God's goodness to you, brethren, I urge you to consecrate yourselves, body and mind, to his service,—the true, real spiritual service of the heart,—so that you may prove in experience the blessedness of doing his holy will. (3) This service you can only accomplish in the spirit of humility and soberness which is inspired and regulated by faith. (4–8) We have various gifts of faith, as the different parts of the body have various functions; let us exercise them all with faithfulness, remembering that unless we are guided by trust in Christ in so doing we shall fall into self-righteousness and vanity. (9–16) Let us diligently practice the various Christian virtues, of which love is the chief, and whose highest exercise is seen in kindness, sympathy, and humility. (17–21) This temper will prevent the spirit of revenge, and enable us to dwell peaceably with mankind. Remember that God will requite wrongs done; do not seek to forestall his judgment; treat foes with kindness; you will so best lead them to remorse and repentance, and will conquer their malignity by love.

CHAPTER XIII.

(1–3) We must obey the civil power, for it is a divinely ordained agency for the punishment of wrong-doing and for the commendation of well-doing. (4, 5) Only if we do evil have we anything to fear from the state. In that case we shall fall under its just and certain penalties. Therefore let us obey, not from fear only, but because obedience is right. (6, 7) The right of the state to obedience involves its right to levy taxes; render, therefore, to the different authorities the dues which they have a right to exact. (8–10) Pay, I say, all debts, except the debt of love. That is a perpetual obligation since it is the essence of the whole divine law which never relaxes its demands upon us. (11–14) To the duties of love I would, then, exhort you. The time of our redemption draws near; let us devote ourselves to deeds of goodness and not to works of vice.

CHAPTER XIV.

(1) Receive to Christian fellowship such as have doubts and scruples as to certain courses of action,— in themselves unessential,— but not with a view to making such scruples objects of special attention and judgment. (2–4) An example of such scruples is found in the case of one who refrains from eating meat. Let not him and the one who has no such scruple judge one another, since God accepts both. Both are Christ's servants, and it is his to approve or disapprove them. (5, 6) Another example is found in one who still holds by the Jewish sacred days. Both those who do this and those who do not are moved by conscientious conviction for the Lord's service. Let them not judge one another. (7–9) So in general we must carefully regard the feelings and convictions of others. Whatever we do we must do in the spirit of service to our Master who both died and rose that he might be the Lord of us all. (10–12) Why, then, judge one another? God alone is judge; all must bow to him, not to each other. Each must stand for himself before *God's* judgment — not that of other men.

(13) Whatever judgments, then, we pass in regard to our Christian brethren, let us by all means pass this one, that we ought not to hinder their religious life.

(14, 15) The man who has no such scruples as I have named is, no doubt, theoretically right. He has all the *rights* which he claims, but love may require him, in certain cases, to forego their exercise. Otherwise he may, by his failure to apply the Christian law of love, injure those whom Christ has so greatly loved as to die for them. (16, 17) Try to keep the Christian fame of your church without reproach by avoiding all such disputes with their unhappy consequences, for religion does not consist in the maintenance, on either side, of such points of difference, but of an inner spiritual life. (18, 19) He who lives that life is approved of God; therefore seek to promote harmony and to build up Christian character in others. (20–23) Such "rights" as I have named yield to the higher obligations of Christian helpfulness; cherish strong convictions of such rights, if you will, but do not try to impose them upon those who cannot admit or accept them. Fortunate, indeed, is the man who in such matters has no scruple as to the course which he decides to pursue, for, of course, those who are in doubt about their *right* to act as they do must be self-condemned because they are not acting with the full consent of conscience, and one sins against his own moral nature when he does, in such cases, what his conscience is not clear in approving.

CHAPTER XV.

(1–3) It accords with the spirit of Christ, as shown in his earthly life, to show a kindly and concessive feeling for the weak and hesitating. His was a life of reproach rather than of self-gratification. (4) The picture of the

suffering Messiah found in the Old Testament was given for our instruction, that we, steadfastly following his example and cultivating his spirit, might have the hope of future blessedness with him in his kingdom. (5, 6) May God give us a spirit of harmony, so that we may unitedly honor him. (7–13) Be therefore considerate and helpful to one another, for Christ has made all, without distinction, the object of his love — the Jews, according to God's ancient promises, and the Gentiles, for his mercy's sake. Let all alike praise the Messiah, as the psalmist says; let all acknowledge him as the true Davidic King of whom Isaiah prophesied, and may you all find peace in trusting him and hope in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

(14–16) I am indeed confident of your sincerity, spirituality, and disposition to aid one another. It was that you might be even more perfect in this regard that I have in some expressions very frankly reminded you of your duty — in accordance with my commission to promote the gospel among the Gentiles. (17–19) Let me not speak, however, of what *I* have done for you or others; Christ has rather done it through me by giving me strength and inspiration, enabling me to carry the gospel from its starting-point in Jerusalem to the remote province of Illyricum. (20–21) In all this labor I made it a point of honor not to work where others were working, but to go to the outlying regions, where the gospel had not yet been carried.

(22–25) The greatness of my task has prevented me from coming to Rome, but now that my work in the regions named is finished, I hope to fulfil the hope of many years, to come to Rome. I want to travel by way of your city when I go to Spain. (26–28) Meantime I must make a journey to Jerusalem to carry up thither the contribution of the Macedonian and Achaian churches to the poor members of the mother-church — a gift which fittingly recognizes the indebtedness of the Gentile churches to the primitive Jerusalem church for a knowledge of the gospel.

(29–33) I am confident that when I come I shall be provided with the power to help and strengthen you. Pray earnestly for me that I may suffer no harm at the hands of the Judaizing opponents of the gospel in Judea; that my mission thither may fully accomplish its end, and that, this done, I may come and find spiritual refreshment among you. Meantime and always may the divine presence, the true source of peace, be yours![1]

[1] Chapter XVI consists so largely of personal references that it did not seem practicable, as it did not seem necessary, to try to paraphrase it.